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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4094
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0408
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 0031
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0381
RUEAHQA/AFRICA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES WASHDC
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/02/2018

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEES TAKE AN OATH OF
SECREC

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Lisa Piascik for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶1. (U) On September 23 some seventy political office holders within the presidency publicly took an oath of secrecy at the insistence of President Yar'Adua. On September 24, presidential spokesman Olusegun Adeniyi downplayed the oath, maintaining some of the advisors were never formally sworn in. Others (including Adeniyi himself and the Chief Economic Advisor), Adeniyi contended, had been administered the oath a second time in error.

¶2. (U) News stories called the oath "illegal" and questioned the need for government secrecy. Former Lagos Branch Secretary of the Nigerian Bar Association, Mr. Ikeukor, told Leadership newspaper an "oath of secrecy is normally referred to classified government document to keep it away from those who have no business with it. The question is, why is it now that the government is asking its staff to swear to an oath of secrecy? To avoid rumors, the channel of information should be open." Other lawyers claimed the oath will impede the passage of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill and the media's ability to hold the government accountable. (Note: No one has elaborated on just how the oath will impede the FOI bill's passage. End note.) A spokesman for the Conference of Nigeria Political Parties (CNPP) called the oath a sign of "an emerging dictatorship" and a "reverse gear for a regime that professes rule of law".

¶3. (C) Comment: Although taking an oath of office is not unusual, given the secrecy surrounding the President's health, the government's recent closure of Channels Television (after reporting that Yar'Adua would resign for health reasons) and reports that a Cabinet reshuffle is imminent, it is curious that the oath was administered publicly and at this particular time. Yar'Adua's unprecedented demand is being interpreted by some as an attempt to send a strong message that he is in charge -- firmly in control of the presidency. In itself, it is interesting that the President feels the need to remind his closest staff of the need for confidentiality, both for what it says about his staff and his desire to be open about issues such as his health. The oath also provides Yar'Adua the opportunity to release (for good cause) those who may leak details of his health or what happens in the black box known as the Presidential Villa to the media or Yar'Adua's enemies. End Comment.

14. (U) This cable is coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS